

**HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION  
CITY OF SEATTLE**

**A SUMMARY OF ORDINANCE 96619  
FAIR HOUSING ORDINANCE**

An ordinance defining and prohibiting unfair practices in the sale and offering for sale and in the rental and offering for rent and in the financing of housing accommodations, and defining offenses and prescribing penalties, and declaring an emergency therefor.

### **APRIL, 1968**

April was a milestone month in the history of race relations on the Federal, State and City levels. It was the month that leaders took giant strides to eliminate one of the sorest inequities in our democracy -- discrimination in housing.

In Washington, D.C., Congress passed, and President Johnson signed into law the Civil Rights Act of 1968. It promised to make discrimination illegal in the sale and rental of 80 percent of the nation's housing. Shortly afterward, the Washington State Real Estate Commission adopted a regulation bringing licensed real estate brokers and salesmen under strong anti-discrimination standards.

But far the most important and significant legislation for the City of Seattle emerged on April 19. On that Friday afternoon the City Council unanimously passed, and the Mayor signed into law, a fair housing ordinance that was stronger even than previous legislation.

The intent of the ordinance was not civil rights, strictly speaking, but better social and economic conditions. These are the safeguards that each citizen is called upon to help establish so that we may live together in peace and with reasonable happiness.

### **How The Law Applies**

In brief, the fair housing ordinance makes it illegal to discriminate in the sale or rental of housing for reasons of race, color, religion, ancestry or national origin.

Because of the ordinance's wide ranging implications, it is almost easier to describe to whom it does not apply, rather than to whom it does, what dwellings it does not cover rather than what dwellings it does.

For example, the ordinance does not apply to the mythical Mrs. Murphy who owns a home and wants to rent a room. But if Mrs. Murphy operates a boarding house, she would come under the law. Similarly, Mrs. Murphy would be subject to the law if she attempted to sell that home.

All other agencies and persons who are connected with the sale and rental of housing come under the law -- from real estate brokers and salesmen to banks and insurance companies that lend money for buying or repairing housing, from a private owner who wants to sell his own

home to anyone who would aid him to discriminate or retaliate against him because he complied with the law.

The ordinance also prohibits the keeping of any form or record containing questions about race, color, religion, ancestry or national origin. It bars the issuance of any notice or advertisement containing such information in connection with the sale or rental of housing.

#### **Guilty or Innocent?**

There is a defined procedure for handling complaints of discrimination.

In summary form it is this:

First, a statement of violation is drawn by the aggrieved party or by the Seattle Human Rights Commission. The Commission then investigates the complaints. Following the investigation, the Commission then must determine whether a probable cause exists to believe that an unfair housing practice has occurred.

If the Commission finds that cause does exist, it will attempt to resolve the complaint through conciliation with all parties. Only after the matter has failed to be resolved amicably will the Commission refer the complaint to the Mayor's Office for enforcement of the ordinance.

Should an agency or person subsequently be found guilty in Seattle Municipal Court of violating the ordinance, a maximum fine of \$500 can be levied. All convictions, of course, can be appealed to King County Superior Court.

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#### **Can We Help You?**

This is only a summary of the Ordinance. For the full text and further information, please contact the Seattle Human Rights Commission.

THE SEATTLE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

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